

Would-be dentists from Utah get an assist

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Would-be dentists from Utah are getting a valuable assist in their attempts to get into dental school through a cooperative program between the University of Utah and University of Washington.

The program assures 10 Utah students of places in the U. of W. dental school each year. The students are enrolled in the Seattle school for their second and third years of dental education, while the U. of U. provides their first- and fourth-year studies, said Dr. G. Lynn Powell, assistant dean for dental education at the Utah school.

The program has helped Utah students to compete more successfully for a declining number of slots in dental schools, without costing the state the full amount of setting up a full-scale dental program, Powell said. Since the Regional Dental Education Program was implemented in 1979, 41 Utah students have been admitted to the U. of W., representing approximately 30 percent of the dental students who begin their studies at the U. of U. While at the Washington school, they pay resident fees, rather than higher non-resident fees.

The cooperative program was instituted to offset national trends in dental education. For many years, Utah students had no difficulty in being admitted to the nation's dental schools. In the past 10 years, however, dental schools have tended to offer openings first to in-state residents or to students whose states are willing to pay a portion of their dental school costs.

The high cost of a dental education also is a factor, Powell said. Few dental students are able to make it through school today without incurring debt, he said, unless they have family resources to see them through.

In the cooperative program, the U. of U. students spend their first year learning the basic sciences upon which dentistry depends. In the fourth year, they receive clinical training in the refurbished barracks building where the dental program is housed.

For the two years between, they build the foundation for a dental career through studies at the U. of W., Powell said.

The U. of U. program provides an additional benefit to the community, he said. Dental assistants are being trained in the facility, and local dentists

are using it for continuing education and research.

Nine "practice" chairs with low walls between afford patients privacy,

but give students access to each other and an instructor, Powell said. A student laboratory is available for instruction in casting dental prostheses

and making models. Local dentists serve as preceptors for students in the program, a strength for the Utah program that is lacking in other states, he said.

Even with the added opportunities available through the cooperative program, Powell said, there are about 50 applicants each year for the 10 availa-

ble positions.

Without the program, however, Utah would continue to slip below national averages in the number of dentists in ratio to population, he said.

Utah's interest in maintaining the program has been evident in the financial assistance provided by the Legislature, Powell said.